



## BRULE RIVER STATE FOREST MASTER PLAN FACT SHEET

### *Fisheries*

The Bois Brule River is one of Wisconsin's best known trout streams. At the time of European settlement (1850's) the Brule was already regarded as one of the finest brook trout fishing streams in the state. Wisconsin's settlement push reached the Brule's remote location last (mid 1880's) so its fishery was correspondingly impacted much later by angler overharvest and logging practices. During this time-period, the majority of the fishery existed in the section of stream from the town of Brule upstream to the Stone's bridge. Brook trout are the only salmonid native to the Brule. Two different brook trout life histories were present originally with the great majority being stream resident (those spending their entire lives in the river). Lake run brook trout (coasters) were also present to a minor extent in the very early history of the fishery but have been only occasionally seen since the late 1880's. Anglers have been continuously concerned about the declining condition of the Brule fishery since the 1890's. In response to the fishery decline locals added non-native rainbow trout and brook trout beginning in the 1890's.

Today's fishery consists of a unique blend of both native and non-native salmonid species exhibiting both resident and lake run life strategies. The present salmonid fishery is both naturally reproducing and self-sustaining. Besides the upper river stream resident fishery the Brule has become a very important spawning and rearing area for lake run salmonids. About 33,000 angler visits are made annually on the river with about 27,000 of these trips targeted at the lake run salmonids (steelhead, brown trout and coho salmon) during the spring and the fall mostly on the lower river downstream of Highway 2. The majority of the remaining 6,000 trips target the stream resident upper river salmonids (brook, brown and rainbow trout).



Angler overharvest has long been the major limitation to conservation of good fishing in both the resident and lake run portions of the fishery. Angling regulations have become progressively more restrictive as time passes in an attempt to adjust to the growing numbers of anglers compared to static numbers of trout. Angling regulations on Lake Superior tributaries are more complex than those on inland Wisconsin trout streams because of this unique blend of variably maturing stream resident and lake run trout and salmon. Today's regulations are designed to allow trout the opportunity of reproducing at least once before they are available for harvest.

Active fisheries management programs include stocking evaluations, trout habitat improvement, and salmonid population monitoring and sea lamprey and beaver control. Trout stocking is an activity that began in the 1890's on the Brule River and was for the most part curtailed in the early 1980's. A steelhead stocking evaluation is ongoing at this time. The present strategy for sustaining and enhancing trout populations is to improve their ability to restore their populations naturally by revitalizing both spawning habitat and living space. The great majority of available spawning areas in the rivers upper

half have been either restored, improved or are currently in the planning stages of being improved. Habitat improvement has been shifting toward restoring living space more recently. Restoring large woody instream cover is being emphasized in the next phase of fisheries management activities. Beaver populations are being controlled on the upper reaches of the stream and tributaries in order to provide trout access to spawning areas and to protect the quality of instream trout habitat. Salmonid populations are monitored by electrofishing (at index stations throughout the watershed), video monitoring (at the sea lamprey barriers fishway window) and at times angler creel census. A sea lamprey barrier was constructed in 1986 as part of an international effort to control lamprey in the Great Lakes and is operated on the river's downstream end. This structure prevents adult sea lamprey from swimming upstream (where they would reproduce) and reduces the Lake Superior population of these non-native fish parasites.